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# Mondale's foreign policy dilemma

It is very late in the day, but some of Walter Mondale's principal advisers are finally waking up to the fact that large numbers of traditional Democrats and thoughtful independents are drifting toward the Reagan camp because of deep unease over the Democratic candidate's foreign-policy stance.

Although his closest aides claim that Mr. Mondale has always been a man of the moderate center, they admit there is an urgent need to identify him more clearly in the public mind as someone who understands the Soviet challenge and is capable of coping with it.

The policy compromises that appeared necessary at the Democratic convention to win over the followers of Sen. Gary Hart and the Rev. Jesse Jackson are seen in retrospect to have skewed the Mondale campaign too far to the left. Cen-

trist Democrats of the Coalition for a Democratic Majority who are admirers of the late Sen. Henry Jackson and top officials of the AFL-CIO who fear massive defections of blue-collar workers have joined in warning Mr. Mondale to move decisively toward the center.

The first sign of a basic shift in direction was the explanation to the press last week by top Mondale aides that the candidate would hold on to his support among peace activists by continuing to stress arms control but would reach out on a second track to traditional Democrats by emphasizing "strength issues."

As an example of a toughening stance, Democratic strategists cited the 3 to 4 percent annual increase in defense spending called for in Mr. Mondale's recently announced budget plan. As if to demonstrate the candidate's reliance on experienced foreign policy advisers, it was also deliberately leaked that Mr. Mondale had taken with him two realistic veterans of the cold war, James Schlesinger

and Max Kampelman, when he received his first secret intelligence briefing from the administration.

The potential contradiction in Mr. Mondale's attempt to proceed on two separate foreign policy tracks simultaneously was dramatized this week by the contrast between a speech here in Washington and a long interview in *The New York Times*.

In the speech, Mr. Mondale included emotional language on Central America designed to appeal to peace activists and liberal Democrats. Condemning President Reagan's "military buildup in Honduras and his illegal war in Nicaragua," Mr. Mondale prophesied that the lasting outcome of Reagan's policies "is American troops at war in Central America."

In the interview, however, the Democratic candidate takes a much more realistic approach toward Central America. In answering a series of searching questions, Mr. Mondale goes beyond the party platform and directly contradicts his running mate, Geraldine Ferraro, in his reaction to the American intervention in Grenada.

While Mrs. Ferraro has condemned President Reagan's decision to send in troops as premature, Mr. Mondale maintains that his initial criticism of the intervention was based on inadequate information. On the basis of what he now knows, he concedes that he also

would have used military force "to go in there and protect American lives." In view of the symbolic significance of the Grenada operation, this shift in Mr. Mondale's position is important overseas, but came too late to do him much good at home.

Similarly, Mr. Mondale in this interview eliminated a deliberate ambiguity in the Democratic platform and committed himself clearly not only to economic aid but to military assistance to the Duarte government in El Salvador. But in dealing with the Sandinista regime in Managua, Mr. Mondale leans toward the dovish wing of his party. He opposes any aid to the "contras" and implies he would not insist on free election in Nicaragua, if the Sandinistas terminated their aid to the Salvadoran guerrillas and sent the Cubans home.

In this complicated game of trying to have his cake and eat it too, Mr. Mondale faces a series of dilemmas as he attempts to win back moderate Democrats while not antagonizing the peace activists.

By stressing his support of a nuclear freeze and a moratorium on nuclear weapons testing, he satisfies the liberal Democrats but leaves unanswered how he would persuade the Soviets to accept the intrusive on-site inspection required for verification of such sweeping prohibitions.

Watching the contortions of this able politician as he tries to hold together the disparate wings of his divided party, middle-of-the-road Democrats are increasingly resigned to the inevitability of defeat this fall.

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